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The Disillusion of the American Dream

美国梦的幻灭

黄文红

指导教师姓名: 李 美 华 教 授

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Abstract

Francis Scott Fitzgerald is widely regarded as one of the great American writers in the twentieth century. His works are evocative of the Jazz Age during which time America had been experiencing an economic boom and significant changes in lifestyle, but the moral values started seeing a steady decline at the same time.

The Great Gatsby, published in 1925, is widely considered to be F. Scott Fitzgerald's greatest novel. It is also considered a seminal work on the fallibility of the American Dream. The term "American Dream" was first used by James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*. America was described as a Dream of a Land with new opportunities and equal chances for everyone. The American Dream is the firmly held belief that everyone has the opportunity to achieve their goals and become rich and prosperous if they only work hard enough. The original idea of the American Dream is about moral values and the pursuit of happiness. But the pursuit of happiness was soon turned into the pursuit of wealth and ultimately to greed. In the 1920s, the American Dream was nothing but an idea of materialistic wealth and objective pleasures.

The Great Gatsby presents realistic image of the American life in the 1920s. In this period, jazz music blossomed, the flapper redefined modern womanhood. The era was further distinguished by several inventions and discoveries of far-reaching importance, unprecedented industrial growth and accelerated consumer demand and aspirations. The Roaring Twenties was marked by a general feeling of discontinuity associated with modernity, a break with traditions. Everything seemed to be feasible through modern technology.

The novel is about an unsuccessful love story of a man named Gatsby who tries to win back his wartime lover -- Daisy and recreate his idolized version of their affair. Gatsby and Daisy has a brief love affair before World War I. However, Daisy marries Tom Buchanan, a rich but boring man of social position. Gatsby loses Daisy because he has no money, but he is still in love with her. So he tries everything to get Daisy back. He makes a lot of money with illegal business and begins to implement his plans, step by step, to "buy" Daisy's love. Assuming that he can buy Daisy's love by

exhibiting his wealth, Gatsby becomes committed into using his money to impress Daisy. Though Gatsby makes a great effort for his American Dream, in the end his dream fails completely since the woman he loves is a corrupt product of modern society. One day, Daisy, driving Gatsby's car, hits and kills Tom's mistress, Myrtle Wilson. When Gatsby helps Daisy to escape from the accident successfully and is mistakenly murdered by the husband of Tom's mistress, his American Dream is broken. There is nothing left to him after his death, his wealth no longer means anything, and Daisy does not come back to him, either.

Fitzgerald explored the theme of love in relation to money in the novel. Gatsby makes a great effort for his dream. He erroneously believes that money can buy him love and happiness. So he lives his whole life in pursuit of wealth and power. Gatsby believes he can win Daisy back by the possessions he owns. But he obtains nothing from his money and his dream is totally lost.

The Great Gatsby is a chronicle of the failure of the American Dream. The rise and fall of Jay Gatsby parallels the rise and fall of the American Dream. The author compares the theme of American dream with Gatsby's dream of getting Daisy back. When Gatsby ultimately loses his dream, the American Dream finally becomes a disillusion.

Key Words: Fitzgerald; Gatsby; the American Dream; disillusion

摘要

弗·司各特·菲茨杰拉德是二十世纪美国最伟大的作家之一。他的作品使他成了 20 年代“爵士时代”的发言人。那时美国正经历一个特殊的年代：经济飞速发展，生活方式发生巨变，而与此同时传统道德却逐渐土崩瓦解。

1925 年出版的《了不起的盖茨比》被认为是菲茨杰拉德最伟大的作品，也被誉为最出色的反映 20 年代“美国梦”破灭的美国小说。“美国梦”这个词第一次是出现在詹姆斯·特拉斯洛·亚当斯所写的《美国的史诗》一书中。美国被描述成一片每个人都能拥有新的平等机会的梦幻之地。美国梦是一个被众多美国人普遍信仰的信念：在美国只要经过努力和不懈的奋斗，每个人均有机会获得更好的生活。美国梦的宗旨原是指对道德价值和幸福的追求，但这种追求很快就变成了对财富的追求，最后演变成了贪婪。20 年代享乐主义开始大行其道，“美国梦”最终破灭了。

在《了不起的盖茨比》中，菲茨杰拉德描绘了爵士时代的众生相。在这个时代，爵士乐流行；“轻佻女郎”重新定义了现代女性；新发明新发现层出不穷；工业飞速发展；人们的消费欲望猛增。这也是一个与传统决裂，与现代紧密相连的时代，现代技术似乎使任何东西都唾手可得。

《了不起的盖茨比》描述了一个名叫盖茨比的人的故事。他想找回他的初恋情人黛茜，并重建他们理想的爱情。盖茨比与黛茜在一战前曾热恋，但因盖茨比家境清寒，黛茜就嫁给富家子弟汤姆·布坎农。盖茨比因为没钱而失去了黛茜，但他仍然还爱着她，所以他竭尽全力想要重新赢得黛茜。在他靠非法买卖发了横财后，他开始实施他的“计划”——买回黛茜的爱情。他天真地以为：有了金钱就能重温旧梦，赎回失去的爱情。但是，他错了。因为他所爱的女人——黛茜是现代社会的产物。一天，黛茜因情绪激动，开着盖茨比的车子在归途中将汤姆的情妇玛特尔撞死了。在盖茨比成功帮黛茜逃脱罪责并被汤姆的情妇玛特尔的丈夫误杀后，他的美国梦彻底破灭了。

菲茨杰拉德在小说中探究了金钱与爱情的关系。盖茨比努力地追求他的

“美国梦”，他错误地相信金钱可以让他买到爱情和幸福，所以他竭尽一生去追求财富。他以为财富可以让他赢回黛茜。但最终金钱没给他带来任何好处，他的梦想也彻底破灭了。

《了不起的盖茨比》是一部“美国梦”的编年史。盖茨比为了追求黛茜耗尽了自己的感情和才智，最后葬送掉自己的生命。小说通过盖茨比的爱情与财富幻想的破灭，揭示了社会道德的沦丧与美国梦的幻灭。

关键词：菲茨杰拉德；盖茨比；美国梦；幻灭

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Introduction

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (1896 – 1940) is an American writer of novels and short stories, whose works are evocative of the Jazz Age, a term he coined himself. He is widely regarded as one of the great writers in the twentieth century. Fitzgerald is considered a member of the "Lost Generation". He finished four novels, left a fifth unfinished, and wrote dozens of short stories that treat themes of youth and promise along with despair and age.

Born on Cathedral Hill in St. Paul, Minnesota, to an upper-middle class Irish Catholic household. His first literary effort was published in a school newspaper when he was 13. He attended Newman School, a prep school in Hackensack, New Jersey, in 1911–1912, and entered Princeton University in 1913 as a member of the Class of 1917. There he became friends with future critics and writers Edmund Wilson (Class of 1916) and John Peale Bishop (Class of 1917), and wrote for the Princeton Triangle Club. As a mediocre student throughout his three years at Princeton, Fitzgerald severed his relationship with the university in 1917 to enlist in the United States Army, when America entered World War I. The war ended shortly after Fitzgerald's enlistment. Fitzgerald wrote a novel titled *The Romantic Egoist*, portions of which later largely were reincarnated as the first half of *This Side of Paradise*.

While at Camp Sheridan, Fitzgerald met Zelda Fitzgerald (1900–1948), the "top girl", in Fitzgerald's words. The two were engaged in 1919. But working at an advertising firm and writing short stories, Fitzgerald was still unable to convince Zelda that he would be able to support her, leading her to break off the engagement.

Fitzgerald returned to his parents' house in St. Paul to revise *The Romantic Egoist*. Recast as *This Side of Paradise* about the post-WWI flapper generation, it was accepted by Scribner's in the fall of 1919, and Zelda and Scott resumed their engagement. The novel was published on March 26, 1920, and became one of the most popular books of the year.

Although he reportedly found movie work degrading, Fitzgerald was once again in dire financial straits, and, like Hemingway, spent the second half of the 1930s in Hollywood, working on commercial short stories and his fifth and final novel, *The*

Love of the Last Tycoon. Published posthumously as *the Last Tycoon*, it was based on the life of film executive Irving Thalberg. From 1939 until his death, Fitzgerald mocked himself as a Hollywood hack through the character of Pat Hobby in a sequence of 17 short stories, later collected as *The Pat Hobby Stories*.

F. Scott Fitzgerald was a writer very much of his own time. As Malcolm Cowley once put it, he lived in a room full of clocks and calendars. The years ticked away while he noted the songs, the shows, the books, the quarterbacks. His own career followed the pattern of the nation, booming in the early 1920s and skidding into near oblivion during the depths of the Depression. Yet his fiction did more than merely report on his times, or on himself as a prototypical representative, for Fitzgerald had the gift of double vision. Like Walt Whitman or his own Nick Carraway, he was simultaneously within and without, at once immersed in his times and able to view them and himself with striking objectivity. This rare ability, along with his rhetorical brilliance, has established Fitzgerald as one of the major novelists and story writers of the twentieth century. It was characteristic of Fitzgerald, who was one of the most autobiographical of writers, to transform his own experience into fiction. Fitzgerald adhered to the Renaissance and Romantic conception of the writer as a man of action who experiences his material at first hand -- not from lack of imagination, but he can write about it more intensely.

Fitzgerald has always been the poet of the American upper bourgeoisie; he has been the only writer able to invest their lives with glamor. Yet he has never been sure that he owed his loyalty to the class about which he was writing. It is as if he had a double personality. Part of him is a guest at the ball given by the people in the big house; part of him has been a little boy peeping in through the window and being thrilled by the music and the beautifully dressed women -- a romantic but hard-headed little boy who stops every once in a while to wonder how much it all cost and where the money came from. Cowley says that this dual perspective works well in Fitzgerald's earlier books.

This Side of Paradise is Fitzgerald's first novel, a classic of American literature. It was published in 1920. In 1922, he published his second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned*. With the publication of his masterpiece *The Great Gatsby* in 1925, Fitzgerald reached the peak of his writing career. In 1933, on the verge of his "emotional

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